ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF BRAILLE

BY THE BLIND

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AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

Disaster Relief in Early Days of the Christian Era

EVEN REHABILITATION WAS APPLIED BY THE ROMAN EMPERORS

DISASTER RELIEF is perhaps generally regarded as a modern development when, in truth, it prevailed in ancient times. These are well authenticated records of relief given disaster sufferers by eminent rulers of the beginning of the Christian era. While such relief was unorganized, as it is today, yet the humanitarian spirit prevailed and, in great disasters of the early centuries, the rulers took it upon themselves to rehabilitate their suffering people. The application of organized relief is less than a century old and it has been so efficiently built up in the last 20 years through the work of the Red Cross Societies of all countries that relief following disaster is taken as a matter of course.

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"The credit of this noble bounty to the public Caesar increased by acts of private beneficence equally popular; the estate of wealthy Emilia Musa, who died intestate, and which was claimed for the prince's purse, he surrendered to Emilius Lepidus, to whose family she seemed to belong; as also to Marcus Servilius the inheritance of Patuleius, a rich Roman knight, though part of it had been bequeathed to Caesar himself; but he found Servilius named sole heir in a former and well-authenticated will, alleging that such wa

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One Hundred Years of Braille Reading by the Blind

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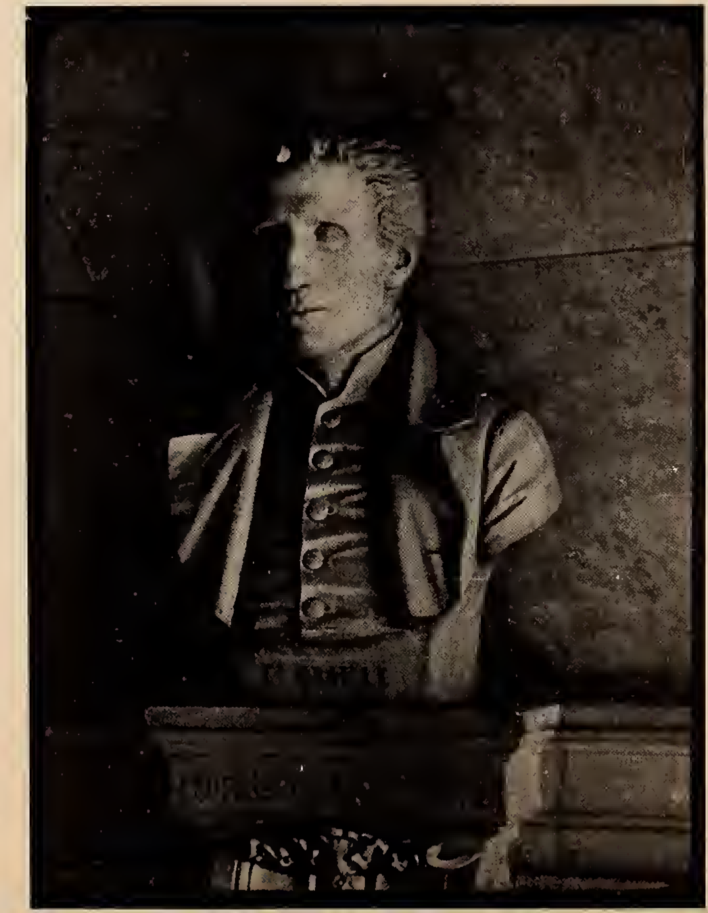
The Story of Louis Braille and His Great Invention

ONE HUNDRED YEARS have passed since the first development of a definite system of writing and printing in raised dot characters for the blind by Louis Braille. This year marks the centenary of the greatest advance in ameliorating the condition of the helpless blind, although Braille's system actually had its beginning in 1825. The effort to bring the alphabet to the blind, however, goes back years before that in making pages in embossed letters. This never proved satisfactory and instruction of the blind in literature and music remained definitely oral until Braille perfected his system.

Tangible reading matter for the use of the blind had seemed impossible, but with the introduction of Braille's alphabet the era of educating the blind as it is understood today began. His alphabet was of universal application to any language, longhand or shorthand, to mathematics and to music. As a system it was adequate to all these purposes and, whenever sympathetically used, was immediately and wholly satisfactory. More than any other single lever it has served to lift the educational status of blind people the world over.



—*Engraving by courtesy of "Outlook for the Blind."*

Louis Braille, blinded by accident when three years old, became first a pupil and then a teacher at the National Institution for Blind Youth, Paris, which was the parent of all such schools. He was born Jan. 4, 1809, at Coupvray, about 23 miles from Paris. It was in his father's harness-making shop where he took up a sharp instrument which slipped and put out one of his eyes. Sympathetic inflammation caused the loss of his other eye.

When ten years old he was sent to the school for the blind and was an excellent pupil, doing well in literature, music and mathematical studies, learning to read the embossed Roman type then generally used. At the age of 16 years he had worked out his alphabetic system, and had supplied a slate on which to write it. He later extended it to music and found it adequate in a study of organ music. In 1827 Louis Braille became a professor at the National Institution for Blind Youth and here he taught grammar, history, geography, arithmetic, mathematics and the piano. His companions in blindness loved and revered him for he was in every way an excellent teacher. He wrote several treatises, among others an embossed work on arithmetic. It was his opinion that, as so much space was required by the embossed method of writing and printing, the fewest possible words should be used, and this habit of condensation, we are told, sometimes lent his work a certain degree of dryness. At the same time he was always concise and understandable.

For years, as a pupil and as a professor at the institution, at home or on holiday, he gave up all his leisure time to the task of trying to find a system by which the blind could write in relief. Of these the one which appealed most to him was that introduced by M. Barbier, a French artillery officer, rich and philanthropic, who did all he could to promote the education of the blind. In 1825 Barbier published a suggestion of embossing by means of a "point" method, the character containing 12 dots, six high and two wide. The character thus obtained was capable of an unlimited number of combinations, but it was large and unwieldy, and the letter was too long vertically to be covered with the fingertip. Louis Braille cut Barbier's letter in half, and thus produced his well-known full six-dot character. On this basis he developed the first definite system of writing and printing in raised dot characters. This was in 1829. After some slight modification it reached its present form in 1834, and is the system which has since borne his name.

Although both pupils and professors soon realized the superiority of his method over that founded on the Roman alphabet, the school authorities refused to change the old system, but he was allowed to teach it unofficially out of school hours. In 1854, two years after the death of its inventor, it was adopted at the Paris institution.

Braille was a practical musician, and it was in the course of his experiments in writing down a music-notation for his own use that he adopted the dot system and saw the possibility of its application to alphabetical characters and numerals. The basis of his music-notation is the ordinary Braille alphabet arranged in four rows containing ten letters each. The seven last letters in each row represent the seven notes of the scale, those of the first row being quavers and the following rows other time values. He was obliged to leave the music-notation, though scientifically sound, in a very primitive state. Indeed, it was only in 1922 that the full possibilities of the system were developed in actual practice.

LOUIS BRAILLE was never a strong man, and he died of tuberculosis at the early age of 43. He was greatly beloved by friends and pupils, was ever ready to give advice, and never hesitated to sacrifice time or health for the benefit of his friends. We are told that on one occasion one of his pupils was about to leave the institution with insufficient means of livelihood. At once Braille resigned one of his organ appointments in favor of this man. Dr. Armitage, in his account of Braille's life, says: "He desired that his friendship should be of some practical use to those who enjoyed it; therefore, he not only carefully watched their conduct, but was often able to tender them good advice. Whenever a painful but necessary reproof had to be administered to a mutual friend, if others showed hesitation in undertaking the delicate duty, 'Come,' he used to say, 'I will sacrifice myself,' and set out on the mission. He so often performed this duty that he became known amongst his friends as the 'censor.'" His name is a household word to all who are blind or working for the blind. He belongs to no country and to no age.

ALTHOUGH the inventor did a very great thing in giving the blind this embossed print to read, he did a far greater thing in providing them with a means of setting down on paper, and reading back, a record of their own thoughts. In a periodical recently published the names of Gutenberg and Braille were coupled as in the first rank of benefactors to humanity. To the world at large Gutenberg gave the printed word. To Louis Braille belongs the glory of giving to the blind access to the literary, musical and educational works of the masters in all languages.

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The transcription of books in Braille by American Red Cross volunteers promises to reach a new high production total this year, judging from the records of the first four months of 1929. From January to April, inclusive, the hand copied books produced aggregate 176 titles in 659 volumes, containing 62,970 pages—truly a rich promise of a practical centenary tribute to Louis Braille.

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